

Schubert, Walter (1896–1980)

SILVIA C. SCHOLTUS

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Walter Schubert¹ was a pastor, administrator, ministerial secretary, and a great Adventist evangelist in the South American Division and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.²

Early Years

Walter was the older of five brothers, born in Bremen, Germany, on December 8, 1896. His father, George W. Schubert, was a Methodist minister who, after having been converted to Adventism, became a canvasser, then an Adventist minister and a successful evangelist. He was president of the conference in Germany, the Central European Union, and the Central European Division, and secretary of the General Conference.³ His mother was also a Bible instructor.⁴ In his home he learned the Bible stories, as well as the stories of the missionaries, from which Walter was inspired to be a preacher. He learned about the importance of the Bible and the books of Ellen G. White. He also learned how to play violin and piano.

When Walter was 14 years old, about 1910, he was baptized in secret because at that time, in Germany, the Adventist Church was considered a little-known sect, and although public meetings could be held, it was forbidden to administer sacraments.⁵ After finishing secondary studies in Germany, Walter attended Newbold College in England.⁶ Before World War I the Schuberts decided to send Walter to Argentina, where there were German colonies, along with an Adventist friend who had come to visit and was returning to that country again.⁷ His arrival in the country came sometime in 1914.

Ministry in Argentina and Chile

After facing different employment difficulties, he received an offer during 1916 and 1917 to work as a teacher at the Adventist school in Seguí, Entre Ríos, Argentina.⁸ During the summer breaks he worked as a canvasser in Buenos Aires.

In 1917 he traveled to Chile to work as an office assistant and accountant at the Chile Conference. He married Amera Balada on March 7, 1921. They had a daughter, Dorita.⁹

Walter was appointed secretary of the department of missionary work of the Chile Conference and managed to make it one of the largest and most important departments in that field.¹⁰ The task of working in this and other

departments of the church assigned to him, over time, led him to write several articles in denominational journals informing about the progress of the mission and also seeking to spread the spirit of the mission to the members.¹¹ Walter had a speech impediment, besides his German accent, but that did not stop him from working, overcoming his problem and becoming a pastor and an evangelist. On May 2, 1925, he was ordained to the pastoral ministry in Puiggari, Entre Ríos, Argentina.¹²

For another four years he was president of the Chile Conference, while continuing to carry out several evangelistic meetings annually. Sometimes he conducted two simultaneous series, with two groups of Bible instructors, preaching three nights in each place. His plans and methods extended to the entire conference. After making important contributions to the growth of congregations in Chile as an evangelist and pastor, in 1932 he had to travel to undergo surgery in the United States.

Schubert dedicated about 15 years to Chile: as factory assistant and director of departments (1917–1923), as pastor in Valparaíso and Santiago, Chile (1924–1929), and as president and evangelist (1929–1932).

From 1933 to 1934 he was called as president and evangelist of the Central Argentine Conference. It was in those years that he tried new urban evangelization techniques. Schubert carried out the same work in the Buenos Aires Conference for 11 years (1934–1945). Then he became president of the Central Argentine Conference (1946). In Buenos Aires he conducted a series of evangelistic meetings each year and raised new churches. He organized in April 1935, with Walter Murray and Daniel Hammerly, the new church of Liniers, in Buenos Aires province. His change in methodology was because of comments received by an Adventist named Hermingilda di Longhi, who attended the Adventist church in Palermo. She suggested that the methods to attract people to Adventist talks were not adequate, as they did it as if it were a normal church service. That gave Walter the idea of starting by presenting the meetings as if they were conferences, not worship service.¹³

His method included starting the evangelistic meetings with talks on social and family issues instead of the traditional Adventist emphasis on prophetic interpretation, and avoiding the Protestant style of praying and singing. After gaining the trust of his audience, he gradually introduced the doctrinal themes and elements of Protestant worship. This technique was very successful.

In South American Division and General Conference

Schubert was appointed the first ministerial secretary of the South American Division in 1947. He held this position until 1954.¹⁴ He taught his technique to other evangelists, particularly in schools that he opened in different parts of the territory of the division. He held meetings in Peru, Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, and Brazil. Adventist growth in this territory is largely a result of his influence. This influence also extended to Inter-America and beyond,¹⁵ when he was appointed deputy director of the Ministerial Association of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's General Conference, in the United States, for eight years (1954–1962). At the time of his

retirement he had served the Lord and the church for 46 years.

Late Years and Legacy

Walter Schubert died on October 29, 1980, in Loma Linda, California, United States. Daniel Belvedere wrote in his obituary: “His wife, his daughters, his three grandchildren, his three great-grandchildren, and all his brothers in faith lament the temporary departure of the one who was the pioneer of public evangelization in South America.”¹⁶

Throughout Schubert’s life he served as a teacher, pastor, office worker, departmental director, treasurer, association president, ministerial secretary of a division, and, finally, as Ministerial Association secretary of the General Conference; but, above all, as a great evangelizer.

SOURCES

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Rhys, William C. *La Patagonia que canta: Memorias de la colonización galesa* [Patagonia That Sings: Memories of the Welsh Colonization] (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2000).

NOTES

1. A more detailed description of the life of Walter Schubert can be found in Silvia Scholtus, “Walter Schubert,” en *Misioneros fundacionales del adventismo Sudamericano* [Pioneer Missionaries of the South American Adventism], ed. Daniel Plenc, Silvia Scholtus, Eugenio Di Dionisio, Sergio Becerra, 3rd ed. (Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos: River Plate Adventist University Editorial, 2016), 205–232. See also: Daniel Oscar Plenc, *Misioneros en Sudamérica: Pioneros del Adventismo en Latinoamérica* [Missionaries in South America: Pioneer of Adventism in Latin America], 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: South American Spanish Publishing House, 2008), 107–118.
2. Salim Japas and Howard Weeks equated him with J. L. Shuler, Carlyle B. Haynes, and W. W. Simpson (Salim Japas, “Walter Schubert,” monograph for the course “SDA Church History” of Andrews University [Berrien Springs, Michigan: 1974], 1; Howard B. Weeks, *Adventist Evangelism in the Twentieth Century* [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1969], 19; Salim Japas, “Fue una llama que ardía” [It Was a Flame That Burned], *El Ministerio Adventista* [Adventist Ministry], January-February 1989, 7–11.

3. George William Schubert (1869–1943) was born in Potsdam, Germany. He was a recognized evangelist and an Adventist administrator. He served as president of the Rhineland-Prussian Conference, the East German Conference, and the Saxony Conference. He later served as president of the European Central Union and as field secretary of the General Conference. He returned to Europe as president of Central European Division and re-entered the General Conference as one of its secretaries. Don F. Neufeld, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996), 2:457, 458. See: "Schubert, George William."
4. Ibid.
5. Walter E. Murray, "*Walter Schubert: Biografía*" [Walter Schubert: Biography] (monographic work found in the E. I. Mohr Library of the River Plate Adventist University, Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos, undated), 2.
6. Daniel Belvedere, "Necrología: Schubert" [Obituary: Schubert], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], May 1981, 19.
7. Murray, 3.
8. Ibid., 4; Japas, "Walter Schubert," 12 (see also the appendix).
9. Amera was the daughter of Enrique Balada, a pioneer of Adventism in Chile and Peru, and his wife, Prudencia Núñez, converts of the work of the first Adventist canvassers who arrived in Chile, Frederick W. Bishop and Thomas Davis (Japas, "Walter Schubert," 11; Murray, 5). His only daughter, Dora Schubert, provided music during his father's evangelization programs. Later she traveled to the United States and married Dr. Wesley Buller.
10. Roscoe T. Baer, "*Asociación Chilena*" [Chile Conference], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], April 22, 1920, 10.
11. Some of Walter Schubert's first articles were "*Una sociedad de jóvenes que progresa*" [A Society of Young People That Progresses], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], January 16, 1922, 12; "*Más acerca de la obra de los jóvenes en Chile*" [More About the Work of Young People in Chile], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], January 30, 1922, 11, 12. An account of a specific case also appeared to encourage and motivate this task in the article "*Recolectando en Chile*" [Collecting Again in Chile], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], January 30, 1922, 12, and in some paragraphs written in "*Parrafitos sobre obra misionera*" [Paragraphs About Missionary Work], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], June 19, 1922, 11. The latter shows how he was collecting on anchored warships in the military port of Talcahuano, Chile. See also Gualterio [Walter] Schubert, "*Algo en que pensar*" [Something to Think About], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], October 23, 1922, 10, 11; Walter Schubert, "*Después de muchos días*" [After Many Days], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], December 4, 1922, 8.
12. Japas, "Walter Schubert," copy of Schubert's curriculum vitae. The White Center Research has the copy of the ordination act of Walter A. Schubert, signed by Roscoe T. Baer.
13. Murray, 11–14.

14. "El XLVº Congreso de la Asociación General" [XLVº General Conference Congress], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review], July 29, 1946, 15; Japas, "Walter Schubert," see Walter Schubert's letter to Japas on page 2 of the appendix.
15. Japas, "Fue una llama que ardía" [It Was a Flame That Burned], 7.
16. Belvedere.

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